

VZCZCXRO0328
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAH #0773/01 2150953
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 030953Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9109
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNOSC/OSCE POST COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2619
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0479
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0501
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2189
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0938
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0986
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0312
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/HSE/CCJ5// PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE// PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1291
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0518

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000773

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KIRF](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: ENCOURAGING NEWS ON FREEDOM OF TRAVEL

REF: A. A. ASHGABAT 0731

[B. B. ASHGABAT 0520](#)

[C. C. 06 ASHGABAT 1293](#)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Richard Hoagland for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In following up on a Human Rights Watch HRW list of individuals previously banned from traveling outside of Turkmenistan, the embassy has learned that most, but still not all, of these individuals either have been allowed to travel abroad, or have been told that they may travel if they wish. A few of the individuals on the list have asked we not raise their names directly with the government. Although informal usage sometimes refers to a travel "black list," we stand by reftel B, which reported the Berdimuhamedov government's pledge to work with us to review cases we bring to its attention. The majority of these cases are being positively resolved. We are not aware of any new cases since Berdimuhamedov took over from former President Niyazov. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Reftel B reported an initial approach from the Government of Turkmenistan stating that it would allow five individuals whose cases were of concern to the U.S. government to travel outside the country. It added that the government was reviewing its law on migration to make "stop travel" regulations clearer, and that more individuals who previously had been prevented from traveling, including those whose names the U.S. government raised, would slowly be reviewed to see whether their names could be taken off the list. Since that time, the embassy and U.S. government visitors have continued to receive assurances, including from Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers/Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov, that Turkmenistan is serious about meeting its international obligations.

[1](#)3. (C) In early July, we received a copy of a message from Human Rights Watch (HRW) asking the embassy to raise a number

of freedom-of-movement cases with the Government of Turkmenistan, with the goal of gaining the government's agreement to allow these individuals also to travel. Post followed up to the fullest extent possible for an update on their situations, and to ensure these individuals wanted their cases raised with the government.

¶4. (C) Following are the names of the individuals on the list and post commentary related to the current status of their cases:

-- (C) Deceased journalist Ogulsapar Myradova's children: Embassy did not check directly with the Myradova children, consistent with their own request that any approaches to the government be made by them, rather than the embassy. As noted reftel C, during its last meeting with the children in late December, the embassy offered to advocate with the Government of Turkmenistan for Myradova's family members to be allowed to leave Turkmenistan. The children said at that time they preferred to try to rebuild their lives in Turkmenistan. They also stated that they would approach the embassy if they needed any assistance, and requested that the embassy not initiate further contact with them.

-- (C) Andrey Zatoka: Although this case, involving the arrest and trial of an environmental activist on charges of illegal possession of arms and dangerous snake venoms, received extraordinary international attention, post questions whether it is purely a human rights case. Post received reliable confirmation from contacts who are friends and colleagues of Zatoka that he was arrested because the arms and toxins that the police allegedly found during a search of his apartment were not, in fact, planted

ASHGABAT 00000773 002 OF 003

"evidence." Although post advocated with the Government of Turkmenistan for Zatoka to be given access to an attorney and be tried in a fair and open trial, post believes that pushing for freedom of movement for Zatoka, who was given three years' probation and who would not normally be allowed to travel for the duration of his probation, sends a conflicting signal to the Government of Turkmenistan about the respect for rule of law.

-- (SBU) Sona Chuli-Kuli: An independent journalist who was not allowed to travel to Kazakhstan for a Eurasian Media Forum in April 2007. Post met with Ms. Chuli-Kuli, who stated that the government allowed her to travel abroad in June 2007.

-- (SBU) Larisa Aranbaeva: An activist not permitted to travel to Russia for a meeting. The embassy met with her. She said she has not been informed that she would be allowed to travel, but also has not recently sought to travel overseas. She requested that the embassy advocate for her to be allowed to travel abroad if, after she checks with the State Service for Registration of Foreigners, if she is still not permitted to travel. She has not yet informed the embassy of the results of her inquiry.

-- (SBU) Svetlana Mamedova: She, along with Gulzhan Babaeva (below), was not allowed to travel to an OSCE conference on freedom of expression in Vienna in June 2006. Her brother was arrested and imprisoned in 2002. Although she did not specify the charges, post believes her brother may have been among those convicted of complicity in the 2002 armed attack on President Niyazov's motorcade. Mamedova told post that she wanted to think about whether to have embassy include her name in a list of freedom of movement cases. Embassy agreed to not include her name until Mamedova gives express permission to do so.

-- (SBU) Gulzhan Babaeva: Along with Mamedova, she was prevented from leaving Turkmenistan in June 2006. Embassy has not yet succeeded in reaching her, but will continue to try. If she is still banned from travel and is willing to

allow the embassy to raise her case with the government, post will pass her name to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a freedom-of-movement case of concern.

-- (SBU) Ashirkuli Bairiev: Editor-in-chief of "Literature and Arts" newspaper who allegedly was arrested on charges related to work for Radio Liberty. He has not since been permitted to travel. To embassy's knowledge, he is still barred from travel, and embassy will request a review of his case.

-- (SBU) Svetlana Orazova and Ovez Annaev (husband and wife): The Orazov family is related through Svetlana Orazova to a former Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers for Financial Affairs and Chairman of the Central Bank who was fired for embezzlement and who fled the country. The family appealed to Turkmenistan's Supreme Court a government decision last winter not to allow Orazova's daughter to return to Beijing, where she had been studying at a university. After the court ruled in favor of the Orazovs, the daughter was permitted to return to Beijing. Since that time, Annaev has traveled to Moscow and Ukraine. Although Orazova has confirmed that she, too, may travel overseas, she has not sought to travel since the decision.

-- (SBU) Merdan Shirmedov: Shirmedov, a Protestant married to an American citizen, was refused permission to leave Turkmenistan to join his wife, allegedly because he had allowed his visa to lapse while he was working for a faith-based NGO in Afghanistan and came to the attention of Turkmenistan's embassy in Kabul. The embassy has confirmed

ASHGABAT 00000773 003 OF 003

that Turkmenistan's courts have since informed him he may depart the country.

-- (SBU) Shageldy Atakov: The embassy has been unable either to confirm a Forum 18 report of find further information that Atakov, a Baptist minister, was not permitted to depart Turkmenistan in May 2006. Post sought to obtain contact information through Forum 18, which has not yet responded. We welcome any additional contact information that would allow us to get in touch with Atakov.

-- (SBU) Murad Uraev: A Hare Krishna believer, he was not allowed to fly to Moscow in October 2005. The embassy was told by the Krishna Consciousness Society that Uraev has been told he will be removed from the "stop travel" list sometime this year, and does not want his case to be raised.

15. COMMENT: Although informal usage sometimes refers to a travel "black list," as unfortunately occurred in reftel A, we stand by reftel B, in which the Berdimuhamedov government pledged to work with us to review cases we bring to its attention. The majority of these cases are being resolved. We are not aware of any new cases since Berdimuhamedov took office. Although we recognize the need to keep pressure on the government and will raise the unresolved cases above where we have been able to confirm that there was no criminal activity involved, it appears the government is indeed working to keep its promise to use and to meet its international obligations. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND